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Broadwell: Things are happening in Fayetteville; really, they are

Charles Broadwell

Go where the money is.

That's the old rule for bank robbers.

In business, it's pretty much the same. In down times, you start digging deeper, scrounging for those quarters between the couch cushions, as someone put it to me in a call last week.

People around North Carolina are seeing more dollar signs here. They read the income statistics. They have a better sense of Fort Bragg's economic boot print. So now these bigger-city business folks are checking us out for the first time.

Some of them come from communities that have looked down on us or looked right past us for years.

That's changing. Perhaps you've detected it happening, too. It can be subtle, as in a meeting I had with two businesswomen from Greensboro who had attended a conference at Fort Bragg to scope out new business. They had never taken the time to stop here before.

It's as if parts of North Carolina are finally discovering the old Cape Fear River town of Fayetteville and the newer Marine Corps hub of Jacksonville, no longer ignored like federal set-aside reservations. On Wednesday, at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Defense Business Association at the Crown Center, examples abounded. I talked with a man from a veterans group from Charlotte. And one of the main luncheon sponsors was Wake County Economic Development. That's Wake, as in Raleigh.

One of the speakers from UNC talked about the university system's expanded role in helping special operations soldiers with their studies, starting with an office to meet with them on post.

We may not be seeing the overnight miracles that some people envisioned with BRAC, but there's still a lot happening beyond the tire-kicking. Some plans may take a decade to pan out; others may flame out entirely. But at least the activity has the rest of the state noticing, and I think that will pay long-term dividends. Having Fayetteville considered as part of the Greater Triangle (how about Quadrangle?) can't hurt.

Now we just need a better way to close the loop. That starts with the road improvements now under way, with many more needed to secure our place on the map.

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